

VZCZCXR08292
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHAM #1509/01 1871300
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 061300Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5438
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001509

SIPDIS
NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2019
TAGS: PHUM PGOV KWMN KJUS SOCI JO
SUBJECT: JORDANIAN LEADERS REVEAL DIVISIONS ON HONOR CRIMES
DURING CODEL SCHIFF, NODEL VISITS

REF: AMMAN 1397

AMMAN 00001509 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: The issue of honor crimes was a central theme in the parallel visits of Codel Schiff and a Nodel of Congressional staffers sponsored by the MFA in late June. King Abdullah noted his deep concern with the issue, but blamed poor leadership in the judiciary for lack of action. Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh said that divisions in the cabinet are preventing coordinated forward movement on the issue. Royal Religious Affairs Advisor Prince Ghazi wondered aloud about heightened western expectations of Jordan on honor crimes. MPs told the Codel that there are not enough votes in parliament to pass amendments to Jordan's penal code which would close loopholes in sentencing guidelines on honor crimes. The division among Jordan's leaders on honor crimes demonstrates their ineffectiveness in promoting a consolidated solution. End Summary.

A Divided Response

¶2. (C) The issue of honor crimes came up repeatedly during the visits of Codel Schiff and a Nodel of Congressional staffers during the last week of June. Members of Codel Schiff made it clear that progress on honor crimes was key to continued economic support for Jordan from Congress, particularly given the current fiscal environment in the United States and competing demands for scarce resources.

King Abdullah: Judges Need "Political Guts"

¶3. (S/NF) King Abdullah told Codel Schiff that Jordan has been working on honor crimes "for longer than it should." The monarch reaffirmed his deep concern and engagement on the issue, noting that his advisors get an angry call from him every time an honor crime is reported. He assured the Codel that honor crimes were high on his list of national priorities.

¶4. (S/NF) While admitting that there were too many loopholes in the penal code which result in reduced sentences for honor crime perpetrators, the King insisted that the actual law was only part of the problem. The King and his government have repeatedly expressed their displeasure at the reduction of sentences in honor crimes cases, but these statements have not influenced the rulings of working-level judges due to poor leadership within the judiciary. The King said that he is now looking to replace the current Chief Justice in part because of his lack of leadership on honor crimes. (Note: The current Chief Justice has also proved to be a poor manager. Post will report further on his imminent dismissal

septel. End Note.) Noting that loopholes in the penal code are in the process of being closed, the King said that he would push for "political guts" on the part of judges to enact the spirit of the revised and more stringent law in individual cases. He is also looking to create a core group of judges who will handle all honor crimes cases, rather than the current system which assigns cases more or less at random.

FM Judeh: Cabinet Divided

¶ 15. (C) When members of Codel Schiff linked continued Congressionally-approved assistance to Jordan with progress on honor crimes, FM Nasser Judeh was taken aback. Calling the honor crimes issue a "blemish" on Jordan which has gained the personal attention of the King and Queen, Judeh responded that honor crimes are "extraordinarily serious" and "extremely upsetting." Judeh acknowledged, however, that the cabinet was not unanimous in its approach, saying that there was "heated debate" over sentencing guidelines and amendments to the penal code. The FM said that the cabinet was following individual honor crimes cases closely and would act to prevent minimum sentencing in the future, although he did not say which legal authority would allow the cabinet to do so.

Prince Ghazi: What Else Can We Do?

¶ 16. (C) During meetings with both the Codel and the Nodel, Prince Ghazi betrayed his frustration with western pressure on Jordan to address honor crimes. He suggested that this pressure was responsible for a tribal backlash in parliament and elsewhere which serves as a barrier to cultural and legal reform. In a direct swipe at Rana Husseini, the Jordanian

AMMAN 00001509 002.2 OF 002

journalist who has pioneered reporting of honor crimes, Ghazi told the Codel that tribal forces in parliament "don't want to be seen as giving in to a female journalist" in amending honor crimes legislation.

¶ 17. (C) Ghazi alternately blamed "neotribalism" and the judicial system based on the Napoleonic Code which Jordan inherited from Egypt for the continuing prevalence of honor crimes and suggested that many "normal" murders were mislabeled as honor killings by the press. Offering an unrepentant monologue on the issue, Ghazi said that a few isolated incidents were unfairly tarnishing the image of Jordan's entire government. He challenged the Congressional visitors to offer effective suggestions to reduce the number of honor crimes in Jordan. "What else can we do? How can we stop honor crimes without giving everyone a lobotomy?" Ghazi asked.

Will the Penal Code Amendments Pass?

¶ 18. (C) Codel Schiff was told by Mubarak Abbadi, chair of parliament's legal committee, that there would likely not be enough votes to pass the penal code amendments which would close the loopholes on honor crimes (Ref A). Abbadi predicted that tribal conservatives would amend the law on the floor of parliament to either allow the current system to continue or defeat the bill outright. (Note: Parliament votes on bills article by article, so defeat of the amendment dealing with honor crimes sentencing would not necessarily sink the entire penal reform package. End Note.)

¶ 19. (C) Other Codel and Nodel interlocutors predicted that the penal code amendments on honor crimes would easily be approved, however. Prime Minister Nader Al-Dahabi, Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, and the King's Religious Affairs Advisor Prince Ghazi all indicated that parliament would likely pass the penal code amendments without further changes.

Comment

¶10. (C) Despite our ongoing insistence that the Jordanian government take action on honor crimes, there continue to be some decision-makers who resist agreement on how (or whether) to do so. Beyond the small steps forward in penal code reform and awareness campaigns, there is no coordinated national strategy to address the cultural and political issues which feed into the honor crime problem. As long as Jordan's leaders remain divided, government efforts to devise and implement the coordinated, aggressive response to honor crimes that the issue demands will likely be hindered and compromised.

Beecroft